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THE QUESTION BOX

The Wisconsin Historical Library has long maintained a bureau of historical information for the benefit of those who care to avail themselves of the service it offers. In "The Question Box" will be printed from time to time such queries, with the answers made to them, as possess sufficient general interest to render their publication worth while.

HISTORIC TREES IN WISCONSIN

Can you give me information concerning trees in Wisconsin which have been associated with historical events or prominent people, or which are noteworthy for other reasons?

I am collecting data about such trees in the United States and any assistance you can render in connection with Wisconsin will be greatly appreciated.

OREN E. FRAZEE,
St. Cloud, Minn.

The following résumé has been prepared by Miss Kellogg in response to your inquiry concerning historic trees in Wisconsin. We trust it will prove to be of some assistance to you.

I Trees in Indian lore and archeology.

1. Mound trees.

Many of the Indian mounds scattered over central and southern Wisconsin are covered with trees some of which have grown to great size. Early archeologists in Wisconsin supposed that these indicated a great age for the formation of the mounds; more recent investigators, however, are of opinion that none of the trees growing from the mounds are old enough to indicate that these earthworks were thrown up more than two or three centuries before the discovery of America. It is now thought that no trees in Wisconsin are more than five or six hundred years old. In the *Arbor Day Annual* for 1893 an oak standing three miles west of Whitewater is described, that is supposed to be older than the time of Marquette. An oak growing on the nose of the bear mound on West Washington Street in Wingra

Park, Madison, is quite large, but probably not more than a century old.

2. Manitou trees.

The Indians venerated natural objects, considering them as manifestation of spirits or "manitous," whom they attempted to appease by some form of sacrifice. Most of their manitous were animals, birds, and reptiles. Occasionally a tree or a stone became the object of their veneration. Henry R. Schoolcraft in the *American Indian* (Rochester, 1851) 78, relates the worship accorded to a large mountain ash in the vicinity of Sault Ste. Marie. So far as we have been able to discover no such tree is noted in Wisconsin annals, although doubtless there were such objects of Indian veneration within this state.

3. Burial trees.

Indian methods of burial varied with each tribe, sometimes even with different clans within the tribe. Tree burial was common among Wisconsin Indians. The body was wrapped in blankets and then placed upon a scaffold high in the branches of a tree. Sometimes the corpses were swung between two trees and left to the elements, and upon rare occasions the body was deposited upright in the trunk of a hollow tree.

4. Cache trees.

In making hordes of stone or copper implements, the aborigines frequently concealed them among the roots of a tree. Instances of the finding of such hordes or caches under stumps or the roots of living trees in Jefferson, Dodge, Washington, Calumet, and Sheboygan counties are given in an article upon "Caches" in *Wisconsin Archeologist*, volume VI.

5. Trail trees.

In order to mark Indian trails, trees were bent or twisted as sign-posts pointing the way. A tree so treated is found in Mercer's Addition to the Tenth Ward of Madison. This hickory tree marked the crossing of two trails, and its branches were twisted to point in the four directions. One of these pointing arms has been broken off, but the other three are yet to be seen.

At Green Lake on the Victor Lawson estate are bent trees indicating an old trail passing through the grounds. See *Wisconsin Archeologist*, XVI, 43.

In the city of Milwaukee near the corner of Wells and Thirteenth streets once stood a beech tree upon whose trunk was carved an Indian figure with a bow in one hand, and an arrow in the other; the arrow pointed towards the Menominee River, and the bow towards the Milwaukee. See *ibid.*, XV, 104. This tree is no longer standing.

6. Council trees.

A very remarkable instance of this kind of tree was the so-called "Treaty Elm" that stood at the extremity of the point of land jutting into Lake Winnebago from the inlet of Fox River, now a part of Riverside Park at Neenah. This elm was of immense size and girth, and was used as a guide by steamer pilots on Lake Winnebago. It was under this elm that the famous colloquy between the Winnebago chief, Four Legs, and Col. Henry Leavenworth is supposed to have occurred, probably in the year 1819. The incident is thus related by Col. Thomas H. McKenney:

"When Gen. Leavenworth, some years previous to 1827, was ascending the Fox River with troops, on his way to the Mississippi, on arriving at this pass Four Legs came out, dressed in all his gewgaws and feathers, and painted after the most approved fashion, and announced to the General that he could not go through; 'the Lake,' said he, 'is locked.'

" 'Tell him,' said the General, rising in his batteau, with a rifle in his hand, 'that THIS IS THE KEY, and I shall unlock it and go on.'

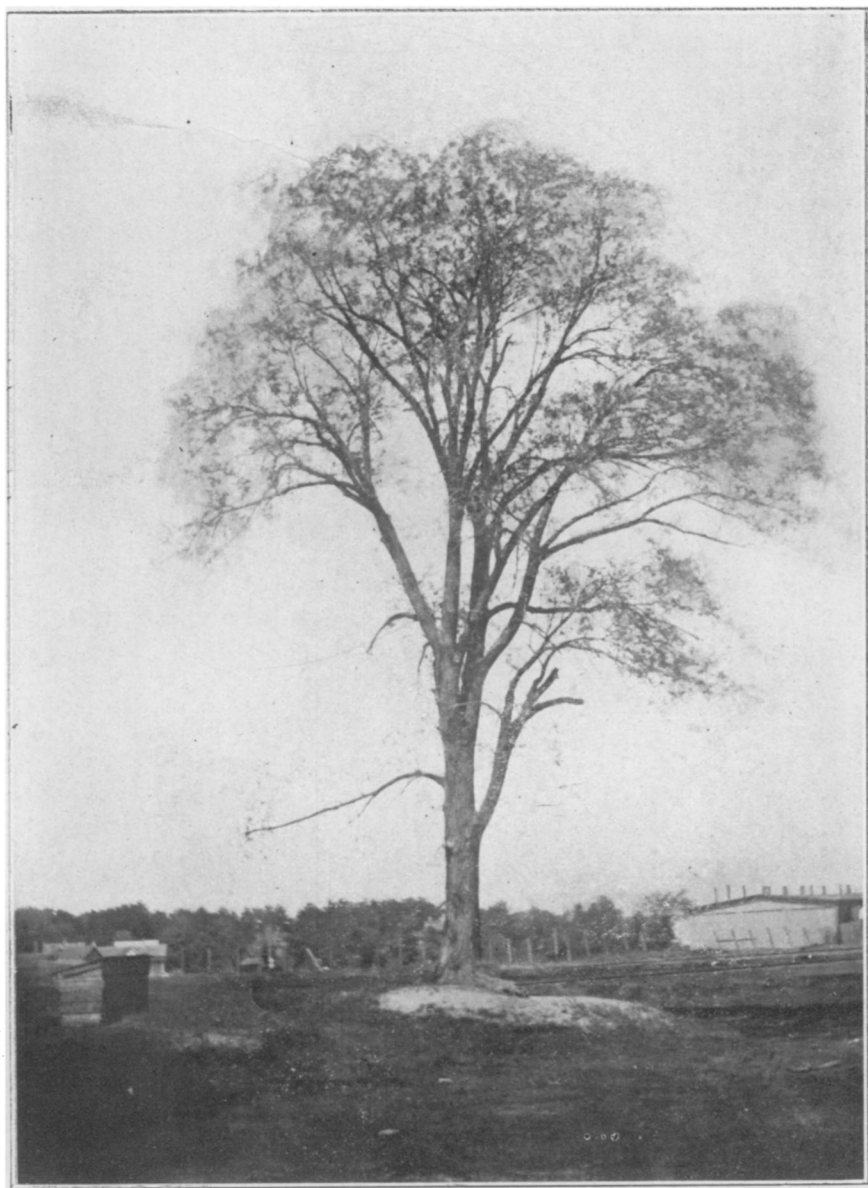
"The chief had a good deal of the better part of valor in his composition, and so he replied, 'Very well, tell him he can go.' "

The Neenah Council Tree stood until 1890 when in widening the channel of the river it became necessary to cut it down. A good photograph of this elm is in the museum of the State Historical Society, and a slab from its wood forms a large table top in the old log cabin of Governor Doty, which is preserved at Neenah as a relic of olden times.

II Trees marking historic sites.

1. The Fort Howard tree.

The Wisconsin tree best deserving the title "historic" is the elm at Fort Howard, still standing in the yard of the Chicago & Northwestern Railway, protected by a railing erected by the railway company. This tree marks the site of the first permanent fortification in



THE OLD FORT HOWARD ELM

From a recent photograph supplied by Miss Deborah Martin

Wisconsin, and represents two hundred years of the history of this region under the rule successively of France, Great Britain, and the United States. The exact date of the building of the first post upon this spot is lost in the mists of antiquity; we know, however, who was the French commandant of the Fort St. Francis in 1718, and surmise that the post was built not long before that date. To relate the history of this post would be to epitomize the history of Wisconsin during the entire French régime. Enough to say that the garrison with difficulty held in check a horde of restless savages; that around this fort were waged the battles of the Fox Indian wars. It was also an extremely profitable fur trade post, and was a center for the graft and speculation that finally led to the overthrow of French sovereignty in America.

After the evacuation of Fort St. Francis by the French, the British in 1761 occupied and rebuilt the post, christening it Fort Edward Augustus. The English tenure was very brief, being maintained only until Pontiac's Conspiracy in 1763. Then the garrison was permanently withdrawn and not replaced until after the War of 1812. In August, 1816 the United States occupied this place with a strong garrison, and built thereon the military post named Fort Howard. This was almost continuously garrisoned until 1852, when the need for martial protection ceased. The garrison was at that time removed, the land and buildings were sold, and but few reminders are left of the historic importance of old Fort Howard save the old elm tree. This stands just south of where stood the commanding officer's quarters, which were occupied by several men noted in American history. Probably the best known of the American commandants was Major Zachary Taylor, who afterwards became president of the United States.

2. The Prairie du Chien tree.

Visitors to Prairie du Chien are shown a tree in whose branches the rebel Indian Chief, Black Hawk, is said to have secreted himself. This is a legend with no foundation in fact. After his uprising Black Hawk had no opportunity of visiting Prairie du Chien until he was brought there as a captive. Then he was at once placed in the guardhouse at Fort Crawford.

3. Historic trees at Portage.

Next in importance to Green Bay and Prairie du Chien in the early history of Wisconsin is the place where now stands the city of Portage. There from time immemorial craft were transported from the Fox to the Wisconsin over a little meadow that formed the watershed between the two mighty systems of the Great Lakes and the Mississippi. In 1828 the United States government built Fort Winnebago at this site, and appointed as Indian agent John Harris Kinzie, son of the early trader at the Chicago portage. Thither in 1830 Kinzie brought his bride, who became the author of the descriptive volume called *Wau Bun*. When Agent and Mrs. Kinzie arrived at the portage there was no agency house ready to receive them, but during his term of office one was begun, across the Fox River from Fort Winnebago, and on the northern borders of the portage meadow. There maple trees were planted for shade and three of them are still standing in the northwestern corner of the Second Ward of Portage City to mark the site of the old Agency House where Mr. and Mrs. Kinzie entertained so many of their dusky wards.

About half a mile east of these maples is an elm, the solitary survivor of a group of three that stood in front of the first tavern in that part of the country, built and owned by Captain Gideon Low, and called by him the "Franklin House." In 1902 the Wau-Bun chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution planted three elm trees to mark historic sites around Portage: one upon the waters of Fox River where the Indians drew their canoes ashore to transport them across the portage; another, on the bank of the Wisconsin River near the site of the monument of Jolliet and Marquette, marks the western end of the famous portage trail. The third elm tree was planted on the site of the first Catholic church and its cemetery, wherein was deposited the body of the noted Indian trader, Pierre Paquette, who was tragically slain in 1836. The site of Paquette's murder, on the corner of West Cook and Mac streets, was marked at a later date by a fourth elm tree.

4. Historic trees in Dane County.

The first house in Madison was built in the early spring of 1837 under the shade of a large bur oak that stood a short distance from the bank of Lake Monona just off from the present King Street.

This historic oak still stands on South Butler Street upon the property of William Oppel, although the house it sheltered has long since been torn away.

On the farm of Knut Juve, in Pleasant Springs Township, still stands one of the two oak trees under which was gathered on September 2, 1844, one of the first Norwegian congregations in Wisconsin. The pastor was Rev. J. W. C. Dietrichson, newly arrived from Norway, and the congregation soon thereafter organized, dedicated on December 19 of the same year a log church which is thought to be the first Norwegian Lutheran Church consecrated in America.

On the bank of Lake Mendota, in the city of Madison, near the foot of North Livingston Street, is a group of willow trees that have grown from cuttings brought by a former sea-captain from the first grave of Napoleon on the Island of St. Helena.

In 1916 there were planted at the village of Mount Vernon elms brought from the original Mount Vernon in Virginia. The occasion of the planting brought together the people of the neighborhood, and an address was made by Hon. John S. Donald, then secretary of state for Wisconsin.

5. Trees marking surveys.

The first road in Wisconsin was laid out and marked in 1832 by United States troops from the garrisons at Forts Howard, Winnebago, and Crawford. In Calumet County on the edge of the old military road there still stands on the land adjoining the F. W. Bishop place at Sherwood a tree on whose trunk were carved the names and companies of several of the soldiers employed in cutting this first Wisconsin road. In 1907 the names were quite legible and probably are so still.

The northeastern boundary of the present state of Wisconsin, as described in the enabling act for Michigan, represented an impossible line, as was proved by the report of a reconnaissance made in 1840 to the War Department by the surveyor Thomas Jefferson Cram. In March, 1841 Congress ordered a second survey, and Cram went again to the northern Wisconsin woods and, after enduring great hardships, completed the difficult task of surveying the boundary for over one hundred miles. His companion on this second survey was Douglass Houghton, a famous engineer for whom later the city of

Houghton, Michigan, was named. Some years since a souvenir of their early explorations was found on a large pine tree on the shore of Trout Lake, in Vilas County. Upon a blaze two feet long and one foot wide had been cut the inscription: "XIX T. J. Cram D. Houghton Aug. 11, 1841." The tree fell before the axe of the lumberman, but the slab containing the inscription was saved, and presented by John B. Mann, of Minocqua, to the museum of the State Historical Society.

In conclusion it may be noted that the long lines of lombardy poplars seen by the roadsides and farmsteads in the eastern part of the state were usually planted by the German immigrants. The Americans preferred elms, maples, and occasionally planted fir trees as wind-breaks. Some time during the decade of the seventies Mr. Adolph Meinecke brought willow cuttings from Silesia, from Haute Marne near Langres, France, and from Turin, Italy, for use in his manufacture of willow ware furniture. These he planted on his farm near Milwaukee, and they have grown and flourished. The Italian Silver Willow (*Salix viminalis*) and the Red Willow (*Salix rubra*) have proved most useful for manufacturing purposes.

I am delighted with the fund of material you sent me regarding the historic trees of Wisconsin. It will prove of valuable assistance to me in my research problem.

I take pleasure in telling you that the Historical Society of Wisconsin has evidently made a more thorough investigation of the subject for me than has any other historical society in the United States.

Thank you very heartily for your kind assistance.

OREN E. FRAZEE,
St. Cloud, Minn.

THE INDIAN TRADE OF ROCK RIVER VALLEY

I am trying to learn more about the fur trade that was carried on along Rock River, in this state, and in your *Chicago and the Old Northwest* I find so many references to the letter books of the Indian Department that I conclude that you visited Washington and made a personal examination of those books and other documents there. If I am right in this, I wish you would advise me if in your investigation you ever came upon any book or document showing to whom licenses to trade with the Indians in Illinois were granted prior to 1821. I have examined the reports of the Secretary of War showing the names of persons to whom licenses were issued in 1821 and subsequent years